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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, October 22, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES ON FOOD SUPPLY". Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the Consumers' Counsel Division of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

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Today we have another bulletin from Washington on the food that will be available to consumers in this year of drought. Today's news puts a brighter face on the prospects for some of the foods that seemed earlier in the season to threaten shortage. The heaviest reductions were estimated in fresh fruits and potatoes. The new bulletin tells us that prospects are better for supplies of fresh fruits and for both white and sweet potatoes. And that's not all. Both fresh and canned vegetable prospects look better now than they did a month ago, and so do wheat, rice, and poultry meat.

The latest official crop report shows that crop prospects increased about 2 per cent during September because of better than usual growing conditions. Pastures made one of the most remarkable recoveries on record for any one month and milk production per cow increased from below average on September 1 to the highest October 1 since 1928. The increase in milk production per cow during September was the first increase on record for the one month, since milk production usually goes down during September. Improvement in milk production appears to be temporary, for with the pasture season over and feed supplies still considerably short, the outlook is for low production in the fall and winter.

But to get a real picture of the whole situation, let's go over the bulletin and compare this year's supplies of all the main foods on which the Government forecasters make estimates with those of other years.

We are not comparing merely the total supplies, because that does not take into account the growth in population. What we are doing is comparing the amount each person would get in these different years if the total supply were divided up evenly among all the people in the country at the time.

Taking meat first, we'll probably have a slightly larger per capita supply of meat than last year. The lamb crop this year was of record size. Then many farmers have had to send their cattle and hogs to market because of short feed supplies. This is true of poultry also. But of course the marketing of hens as meat will have its effect on the egg supply for the coming year. The estimates of egg supplies have moved in the last month from the plus side of the ledger to the minus side and are now expected to be 4 per cent smaller compared with a slight gain forecast a month ago.

Because of higher costs of feeds there will probably be less milk and butter next year than we would otherwise have had. The estimates of milk and cheese still point to a supply of these dairy products just about six percent less than last year. But we must remember that last year was an unusually big dairy year and, if we get the amount of milk and cheese the forecasters expect, the share for each of us will be quite a bit larger than our share in the year 1934-35, and noticeably larger than the per capita supply in the five years 1925 through 1929.

The supply of fresh fruits promises to be down about one seventh below last year's crop, though only slightly below the other drought year -- 1934-35. But the canned fruit supply will probably be only a little lower than last year's. We'll have less dried fruit than the abnormally plentiful supply of last year, but a good deal more than we had in either of the two years before.

We recently reported that this year's citrus crop was expected to be the largest on record and now the official crop report places grapefruit production at 27.6 million boxes compared with the previous high mark of 21.4 million boxes in 1934.

The forecasters never predicted a shortage for this year of fresh vegetables in general (not including potatoes). And now that they have had a chance to get a better perspective on fall vegetable planting they think we'll have considerably more than we had per person last year or year before, and almost one sixth more than we had in 1933-34. In canned vegetables the story is a little different. Last year we had a tremendously big supply, and this year we can't match it. But the estimates show that what canned vegetables we will have this year will probably beat the season 1934-35 and 1933-34 by a good margin and be one fifth larger than in the years 1925-29, on a per capita basis, of course.

We still have to face greatly reduced potato supplies. Both white and sweet potatoes will be considerably below any recent year's supply. But the prospects have been improving and since this is a crop on which the whole story cannot yet be told we may have even more improvement as the season goes on.

We'll have more lard this year than last year's per capita supply, but rather less than that of any of the other recent years we've been talking about. But in years like last year when the lard supply is shorter than normal, the supply of other fats and oils jumps up to help fill in the gap. Last year this happened to the tune of 10 per cent, and for 1936-37 an additional small increase in these other fats and oils is on the cards.

Taking all foods together, the supplies for the 12 months ending with June 1937 will probably be about 3 per cent less than the supplies of those foods that went into consumption channels last year.

But let's remember that these figures are only for "apparent consumption or disappearance of human food". They take no account of the proportion of waste that can vary from year to year depending on the supply and price situation. When supplies are not so plentiful, more of the food that is produced actually gets to the retail store where the consumer buys it, and the consumers themselves will probably play a part in cutting down the waste. So it is likely just as much actual food will be consumed this year as was consumed in other recent years.

